Zeitschrift:	Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber:	Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band:	39 (2012)
Heft:	5

Rubrik: Notes from parliament

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. <u>Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.</u>

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. <u>Voir Informations légales.</u>

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. <u>See Legal notice.</u>

Download PDF: 28.04.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

The FDFA's Consular Directorate – an international centre of expertise?

At the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lausanne, Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter once again underlined the importance of the Swiss community abroad in the Federal Council's foreign policy and its significance to the FDFA. By its very nature, foreign policy involves international cooperation. The FDFA's Consular Directorate has therefore been assigned the task of developing instruments and processes to support our representations abroad while also performing international networking activities concerning consular services and visas. An overview of its activities.

An increasing workload

700 000 – 16 000 000 – 500 000: these figures reflect the operational workload of the FDFA's consular services. Whether it is the number of Swiss abroad, the total number of trips abroad made by the Swiss each year or the number of visas issued by our representations annually, we are facing a constant increase in our workload coupled with increasingly complex and diverse cases.

In view of these circumstances, the Consular Directorate has been given a seemingly straightforward mandate – the coordination and optimisation of collaboration with international partners and other foreign ministries combined with the task of providing our consular services in an efficient and customer-oriented way.

Most of our European partners find themselves in a similar situation as they have to pursue the same objectives, albeit under sometimes different labels. Irrespective of whether a network of representations is undergoing reorganisation, restructuring or realignment, both we and our partners must ensure that our limited resources are deployed efficiently while maintaining or improving the quality of the services provided. Ideally, this results in an opportunity to complement the representation networks of partner states reciprocally to ensure a wide geographical spread of customer service. Two areas of cooperation are particularly topical.

Passports and biometrics

The biometric passport is a major issue. Even though many services are currently provided online, direct contact between the applicant and one of our passport centres (consulates or passport offices in Switzerland) is required to record the biometric data for passports. Why couldn't Swiss citizens, living in a country where Switzerland has no representation or where the nearest Swiss consulate is several hundred kilometres away, use a German consulate, for example, to record the biometric data? This attractive prospect is not feasible at present due to the different technologies of the systems deployed.

IT architecture - data security - system compatibility: from a biological perspective, a finger is a finger and its print is clearly identifiable. Yet, since bits and bytes have been replacing ink more and more, the recording and transmission of this biometric data within our IT systems requires a level of compatibility that does not yet exist internationally. An initial pilot project is nonetheless underway. The systems of Liechtenstein and Switzerland are currently being adapted to enable citizens of Liechtenstein to use the technology at Swiss representations for recording biometric data for their passports in future. The data will then be sent to the passport office in Vaduz.

The idea of collaboration with foreign partners in the processing of passport applications (recording and transmission of biometric data) remains a contentious issue. The heated debate on data protection in Switzerland during the referendum on the introduction of the biometric passport, which was approved by the tightest of margins (50.1%), serves as a reminder of this.

Well-coordinated collaboration

The second area of international cooperation is the issuing of visas. Switzerland is actively committed to the development of the Schengen philosophy of shared responsibility by regularly concluding agreements with other Schengen states on representation in visa matters for countries and regions where we do not have our own representation with consular services. The system is based on reciprocity, and we are currently working with ten Schengen states that we now represent in various constellations at 17 locations and which, in return, process visa applications for Switzerland at 19 locations.

International protection?

The over 700,000 Swiss citizens abroad and the ever increasing mobility of the population are resulting in a continual rise in the number of consular protection cases. The closure of the consular departments at various embassies and consulates general and the concentration of consular services at regional consular centres are sometimes resulting in longer distances between Swiss citizens abroad and the administration. Cooperation with European partner states is also an option here, although Switzerland finds itself in a unique position. Citizens of European Union member states receive protection from the diplomatic or consular representations of any EU state in accordance with EU directives. This provision does not apply to Switzerland as a non-EU member.

Solutions must therefore be sought bilaterally, that allow Swiss citizens to receive support from non-Swiss representations under certain circumstances. Close international cooperation already exists in crisis situations (political unrest, evacuations, etc.) while just one single bilateral agreement has been concluded on everyday consular collaboration. An agreement between Austria and Switzerland from 1979 enables the provision of consular services for citizens of the other state at certain locations where just one of the two states is represented. As the content of this agreement and the list of representations concerned are outdated, there are plans to update this and initial talks are underway. Similar negotiations are taking place with other European countries.







In addition to negotiations with European states, Switzerland is also in contact with other possible partner countries with overlapping or complementary interests. Discussions are being held with Turkey, Russia, Brazil and China on a wide range of issues, such as consular collaboration, integration of the respective immigrant communities, the promotion of tourism and access to the international community in Geneva.

International collaboration and public private partnerships (PPP)

With the aim of supporting the promotional activities of Switzerland Tourism, especially in the emerging markets of India, China and Indonesia, the Consular Directorate is collaborating closely with partners in the tourism industry. Solutions are being sought that enable travellers from these countries to visit Switzerland without major obstacles. This involves establishing smooth and wellcoordinated visa management between the various parties involved – local travel agents, Switzerland Tourism and the Swiss representations. This PPP approach allows all parties to adapt to the requirements responsibly and to the situations faced by the other players.

What next?

The path towards ensuring efficient, institutionalised and regular exchange has therefore been mapped out. It is now a matter of assessing the next steps and areas of cooperation. This approach will be pursued over the coming years, and the Consular Directorate will continue to develop its international networking activities with great enthusiasm in order to fulfil the mandate assigned to it.

REORGANISATION OF THE NETWORK OF EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

As part of the ongoing review of the Swiss network of representations, which has resulted in the opening of regional consular centres at 11 locations worldwide since the beginning of 2011 during its first and second phases, we are now embarking on the third phase. The reorganisation will be completed by 2014. This third phase will affect several representations worldwide whose consular departments are to be centralised.

The relevant Swiss communities abroad will be kept informed directly by their Swiss representation. We are aware of the inconvenience that the reorganisation is causing for some Swiss citizens and are therefore simultaneously providing support measures. These include the opportunity to submit biometric data for Swiss passports at any Swiss representation or any passport office in Switzerland (in conjunction with a passport application within six months at the responsible Swiss representation), the possibility of using a mobile biometric data capture system and the FDFA helpline, which has been available 24 hours a day since spring 2012 (see page 29 for contact details).

CLOSED CONSULAR DEPARTMENT	NEW REGIONAL CONSULAR	DATE
(the representations concerned will remain open for	CENTRE RESPONSIBLE	(schedule status
safeguarding interests unless otherwise specified)	de discondination (The beaut del	1 Sept. 2012)
Guatemala City closure of the embassy	Not yet decided definitively;	31.01.2013
The historic puspest, the country of sheritron, as a council	planned: San José (Costa Rica)	bus resource leaves
La Paz (Bolivia)	Lima (Peru)	04/2013
Ankara (Turkey)	Istanbul (Turkey)	04/2013
Los Angeles responsible for the states of AZ, CO, NM and the Californian counties of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara,	San Francisco	07/2013
Orange, Imperial, Ventura, Riverside, Kern Chicago closure of the consulate general responsible for the states of	New York – for the states	07/2013
ND, SD, IL, ID, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, OH, WI	ND, SD, MI, MN, OH, WI	07/2013
NU, 3U, 1L, 1D, 1A, K3, M1, MN, M0, ML, 011, W1	Washington – for the states of	
	IL, NE, KS, IA, MO, IN	
Maputo (Mozambique)	Pretoria (South Africa)	07/2013
Toronto (Canada) closure of the consulate general responsible	Montreal (Canada)	07/2013
for the states of ON, MB, SK, NT		
Sarajevo (Bosnia)	Vienna (Austria)	07/2013
Skopje (Macedonia)	Pristina (Kosovo)	07/2013
Nikosia (Cyprus)	Athens (Greece)	07/2013
Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) closure of the consulate general responsible	Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)	2014
for Tabuk, Medina, Makkah, Baha, Asir, Jizan and Najran		les alifes a signation
Dubai (UAE) responsible for Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Um Al Qwain,	Abu Dhabi (UAE)	2014
Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah		





Publications

For Peace, Human Rights and Security

As part of its foreign policy, Switzerland is committed to peace, respect for human rights and the protection of displaced persons and refugees. Find out more about its priorities, the services it provides and the challenges it faces in the new brochure. You will also gain an insight into the roles of the people who mediate in conflicts, monitor elections and work towards ensuring peace and respect for human rights. The publication is available in German, French, Italian and English from:

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) Information/Publications Bundeshaus West 3003 Berne E-mail: publikationen@eda.admin.ch Tel.: +41 31 322 31 53 The electronic version is available at: http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/ doc/publi.html

Important notice

Please do not forget to notify the embassy or consulate general responsible for you of your valid e-mail address and your mobile phone number.

Register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters, etc.). The latest "Swiss Review" and recent issues can be read and/ or printed out at any time via the Review link on the websites of the Swiss representations abroad or directly at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" is sent to all Swiss citizens abroad registered with an embassy or consulate general free of charge either electronically (via e-mail and as an iPad app) or in printed format.

Helpline number from Switzerland: 0800 24-7-365 Helpline number from abroad: +41 800 24-7-365 E-mail: helpline@eda.admin.ch Skype: helpline-eda



29

ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

At its meeting on 4 July 2012, the Federal Council decided to put the following proposals to the vote on 25 November 2012:

- 1. Amendment of 16 March 2012 to the law on epizootic diseases;
- 2. Federal law on the international withholding tax of 15 June 2012;
- 3. Federal resolution of 15 June 2012 on the approval of the agreement between Switzerland and Germany on cooperation in the fields of taxation and the financial market and the protocol on the amendment to this agreement;
- 4. Federal resolution of 15 June 2012 on the approval of the agreement between Switzerland and the United Kingdom on cooperation in the field of taxation and the protocol on the amendment to this agreement;
- 5. Federal resolution of 15 June 2012 on the approval of the agreement between Switzerland and Austria on cooperation in the fields of taxation and the financial market.

Proposals 2 to 5 will only be put to the vote if referenda are called against them. The referendum deadline expired on 27 September 2012 after this edition of "Swiss Review" went to press. (See also pages 17 and 18)

Forthcoming referendum dates: 3 March 2013 – 9 June 2013 – 22 September 2013 – 24 November 2013

POPULAR INITIATIVES

At the time of going to press, the following federal popular initiatives had been launched since the publication of the last edition of "Swiss Review" (deadlines for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- Für ein bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen (For an unconditional basic income) (11.10.2013)
- Schutz vor Sexualisierung in Kindergarten und Primarschule (Protection against sexualisation at nursery and primary school) (17.10.2013)
- Für den Schutz der Grossraubtiere (Bär, Wolf und Luchs) (For the protection of large predatory animals - bear, wolf and lynx) (19.12.2013)
- Schutz der Gesundheit vor dem Passivrauchen Für einen effektiv wirksamen und nicht diskriminierenden Schutz gemäss den Normen der WHO (Protection of health against passive smoking – For effective and non-discriminatory protection in accordance with WHO standards) (19.12.2013)
- Zur Durchsetzung der Ausschaffung krimineller Ausländer (Durchsetzungsinitiative) (For the enforcement of the expulsion of foreign criminals - enforcement initiative) (24.01.2014)

The complete list can be found on the Federal Chancellery's website at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

FDFA OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER: JEAN-FRANÇOIS LICHTENSTERN, RELATIONS WITH THE SWISS ABROAD, BUNDESGASSE 32, 3003 BERNE, SWITZERLAND TEL: +41 800 24-7-365, WWW.EDA .ADMIN.CH / E-MAIL: HELPLINE@EDA.ADMIN.CH